

HOW TOTALITARIANS GAIN ABSOLUTE POWER

The Key: Casting Out "Enemy Groups" from Society

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NOW that we are past our first numbed reactions to the horrors of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, an act of intellect is required. What is the meaning of these horrors? Are they an inevitable and logical outcome of the history of our Western civilization, or a product of unique accidents? May we expect them to be limited to the Central and East European plain, or are the countries of the North Atlantic equally susceptible?

Certainly, to answer these questions the most searching investigation into the origins and practices of totalitarianism is required. Such an examination was initiated in Hannah Arendt's superb book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. But the "origins" of which she speaks add up to a single basic tendency in Western society as a whole. She sees the totalitarian tragedy arising out of a vast

process of disintegration, involving the decay of traditional monarchy, the rise and fall of the national state, the advent of imperialism, the transformation of integrated social groups into masses, Western man's loss of his spiritual home, his bewilderment in a new social world in which nothing has meaning and hence "everything is possible."

All this is surely relevant to the rise of totalitarianism. I feel, however, that in addition to these "Origins" with a capital O, we also need to look into more immediate, lower-case "origins" which would explain why full-fledged totalitarianism arose at certain times, in certain places, and not at other times in other places. Why are Russia and Germany the only two countries that developed a complete totalitarian system? The general background of Western civilization is only—a background. It leaves unanswered the question: how was it possible for a particular political organization, the Single Party, to attain absolute power in those great states? How was it possible for it to exercise such complete and arbitrary discretion in deciding who was to live and who to die, who was to be "accepted" and who was to be labeled "outlaw" and cast out from society?

If Communism has turned out to be Nazism's twin, we now realize that this happened because, in addition to being Russian, and authoritarian, and imperial, it, too, had become totalitarian. What is the nature of this social component that has sprung almost full-blown upon an astonished world twice in a single generation? Is it the resurrection, as so many said when we first saw it in Germany, of medieval, and pre-medieval, ways of thinking? Is it the product of the decline of our Western society? Or is it the inevitable fruit of the gigantic, modern industrial state? And if so, which of us is immune? PAUL KECSKEMETI is a philosopher and social scientist on the staff of Rand, an independent research organization, where he is engaged in studies of totalitarianism. He contributed an article, "Prejudice in the Catastrophic Perspective," to our March 1951 COMMENTARY, which many readers told us was one of the most suggestive pieces of social thinking they had ever read. His book *Meaning, Communication, and Value* has just been published by the University of Chicago Press.

THOUGH it would be impossible to imagine such a degree of subservience and unanimity as prevails in the totalitarian society without perfectly ruthless application of force by the power-holders, totalitarianism did not come into being simply through use of violence by a malevolent minority. Before the Single Party could achieve control, there had to be, on the one hand, desperate people who could see hope only in a quick, radical social transformation, and on the other, "conservatives" who so yearned for order

and stability that to get these they were willing to disarm all opponents of the fanatics and desperadoes. It would seem that the Single Party could only consolidate its power when the social forces working for *change* converged with the social forces of *inertia* in crushing and disarming all opposition. This may be called the paradox of totalitarian usurpation.

In "normal" times, the forces of conservatism, of inertia, are strong enough to hold the forces of extreme radicalism in check. When, however, a very large contingent of the members of society is "mobilized" for total change, many conservatives will fall in behind them. But under what conditions will a substantial section of society be "mobilized" for radical change under the leadership of a group claiming the unique prerogatives of the totalitarian party? The answer is that this will happen only if the society is in a *traumatic* condition. The only true totalitarian regimes we know can be traced back to a historic trauma: the First World War.

What is a societal trauma? A catastrophe experienced by a society assumes "traumatic" proportions if, for some reason, it cannot be assimilated or taken in stride as part of the order of things. In warlike ages and cultures, a war is not traumatic; to become so, it must be unanticipated, it must be morally shocking in the highest degree, and it must have a character of irreversibility—engulfing more and more areas of society, until nobody can see a possible escape.

When a society is in a state of trauma, the stage is set for a "savior" to appear. The combination of moral revulsion and abject fear inclines men to the belief that the process can only be reversed by annihilating those who are responsible for it. Thus, the first step on the road to totalitarian power is to define and isolate a small, iniquitous minority, so that the strongest opponent of this minority can offer his promises of redemption.

When such a "savior" enters upon the scene, he is not completely unknown. In his early career, the leader of a

totalitarian movement is known as a deviant and isolate, head of a small and raging sect that practically nobody takes seriously. But during this pre-history, the future savior acquires a moral capital which will be of inestimable value later: he will have defined and identified an "iniquitous minority" of "public enemies." Once society has suffered a trauma, the former sectarian and isolate may be vindicated as a prophet. People remember his denunciations and warnings, and many accept his diagnosis of the evil which must be cast out. The would-be savior will acquire a large number of faithful followers. If he is a skillful demagogue, he will do his utmost to identify himself with those ideas that have the greatest resonance in his society: inspiring and altruistic ideals as well as dreams of aggrandizement and plunder. Few will either dare or care to reject him completely and unreservedly, for the whole point of his rhetoric is that only knaves and traitors can be against him and his redeeming mission. The "savior's" policy is so to manage things that only the "iniquitous minority," and those fully identified with it, will be openly against him. If and when he succeeds in this, he will be in a position to seize complete control, either because all important groups are against the "iniquitous minority" (the czarist ruling class, in Russia), or because those who do not actively hate this minority do not consider its fate important enough to make an issue of it (the Jews, in Germany).

WORLD WAR I was the great trauma of the Western world, and the totalitarian systems of the 20th century owe their existence to it, directly or indirectly.

The trauma of the war was particularly profound in Russia. The main reason for this was that World War I was a "total war," the first such in modern history. Now, a total war is far more destructive to a predominantly agricultural than to a predominantly industrial society. Total war means a war of long duration, gradually mobilizing all the resources of society for war purposes.

Such a progressive mobilization, however, means something fundamentally different in the industrial and in the agricultural sectors. Industrial mobilization, with all the hardships it involves, at least signifies full employment of people and resources; the industrial population by no means loses its economic basis of existence (unless industrial bombing becomes a feature of total war, but in World War I this was not the case). In the agricultural sector, particularly if it is a primitive, non-mechanized one, mobilization means that the productive forces—men and horses—are taken out of production and used for non-productive purposes. If the war is short, this can be assimilated. But if the war is long and mobilization total, the rhythm of mobilization will overtake the reproductive cycle of men and animals, and the economic basis of rural existence must decay.

This trauma hit rural Russia with elementary force in 1917: revolution broke out when, in the fourth year of war, the new planting season was approaching and a fresh wave of mobilization was in the offing. This made it simply impossible for the rural masses of soldiers to continue active fighting. The impact of Lenin's propaganda, denouncing the war as a supreme crime concocted by imperialists and profiteers, was tremendous. This description made abundant sense to the ordinary Russian: for was it not a fact that when ordinary people had not enough to eat and had to endure the greatest hardships, the rich were as rich as ever and the mighty lost nothing? It was precisely because the trauma was war itself, and not a peacetime economic depression of the Marxist pattern (from which all classes suffer to some degree), that a "Marxist" interpretation, setting off a small circle of "profiteers" against the large mass of the "toilers," proved so convincing. It is by no means a mere historical irony that Marxism became dominant in a primitive agricultural country rather than in the industrial societies for which Marx had prophesied it.

In Germany, things were entirely different. The trauma which eventually resulted

in Hitler's coming to power was, not the war as such, but defeat. The German people perfectly "understood" the war and they accepted progressive mobilization; what they did not understand was how they could be defeated. Or rather, they could understand it only as the work of criminal conspirators, internal enemies. Hitler defined and isolated this group of criminals, this "iniquitous minority"—he named the Jews. It was essential for the eventual success of his "redeeming mission" to designate a very small minority in a precarious social position as "public enemy by definition." It would not have been possible in Germany effectively to outlaw and isolate any other group.

BUT Hitler's first crusades against the Jews were rather unsuccessful. The reason was that the trauma of defeat slowly receded in the first years after the war. Only fresh disasters could reinforce it, and the runaway inflation of 1923, though certainly catastrophic to large groups, was not traumatic enough—an inflation is in many ways less terrifying to society as a whole than a depression is, for while it completely ruins certain groups, it benefits others, and it does not paralyze production. The depression and unemployment of 1930-32, however, had a fully traumatic character of irreversibility. It was a process of "progressive immobilization," the reverse of "progressive mobilization," but no less terrifying. As this seemingly irreversible process was unfolding, Hitler used the opportunity to claim vindication as a prophet: had he not always predicted that the German people would be "destroyed" by Germany's defeat, as implemented by the Versailles treaty, for which the Jews were responsible?

Since their traumatic origin was so dissimilar, German and Russian totalitarianism differed in many essential respects. While, in Russia, war-weariness organized the masses against the upper crust, in Germany the depression plunged many class groups into anxiety and despair; not only workers who feared unemployment but also farmers who feared dispossession, and large elements

of the middle and upper class who feared *déclassement*. To a large extent Hitler used, for his "redeeming mission," the energy supplied by groups that were afraid of being pushed down and saw enemies "below" as well as "above." This explains the "fascist" features of his movement.

Yet, despite this and other differences, both regimes developed, as they unfolded, a unique relationship between rulers and ruled. This relationship is the essence of totalitarianism.

WHEN we consider the vast, arbitrary power which the inner circle of the rulers wield in the totalitarian society, and the defenselessness of the citizens in face of the political authorities, one is tempted to define this relationship as a kind of slavery. Sociologically speaking, however, this definition would be wrong. Though the term "slavery" covers, in actual fact, a wide variety of conditions of life, one thing seems to be common to all of them: the slave, because of the peculiar status which sets him off against "free" persons, must consider himself as a "tool"; he has no independent existence in civil society; his existence is submerged in that of the master or owner, who may be another human being, or a public corporation like the state, or the temple of some god. The nature of this relationship is such that the slave can take no initiative for himself. Someone whom he has to obey blindly will set for him tasks to perform.

Now the situation of the private individual in totalitarian society is completely different. No institutional arrangement subordinates him to a private or corporate owner who can and will instruct him in concrete terms as to what he is to do. In a sense, he is a responsible agent; he must make decisions for himself. Not that he is free to make many decisions without grave risk; on the contrary, he must always be careful not to run afoul of a supreme power that can crush him. But this power is remote and invisible. If "blind obedience" is expected from the citizen of the totalitarian state, it

is not obedience to any person. Indeed, whom *could* he obey blindly? The Supreme Leader? Impossible, since the Leader does not give orders to the individual citizens. Some sub-leader appointed by the Supreme Leader? Impossible again, for any sub-leader may turn out to be a traitor or at least a blunderer, and then all those who have obeyed him "blindly" must share in the blame he incurs. The individual citizen in the totalitarian state lacks the means of orientation available to the slave who can know in every case whose orders he must obey and *what* these orders are. The power which the citizen of a totalitarian state has to obey and propitiate is in many ways like the power of nature: inscrutable, inexorable, and quick to reward or punish, whether compliance was within one's power or not.

In contrast to a slave society, there is in the totalitarian regime just one normal status of citizenship for every individual. The catch is simply—and this is the point upon which totalitarian domination rests—that this status can be arbitrarily revoked by an authority which has unlimited discretion. This prospect is indeed a frightening one. For loss of civil existence means that a person is declared to be a public enemy, and must be treated as such by every member of the community. He has no rights, no protection from any kind or degree of aggression, no opportunity to consort on equal terms with anyone except other outcasts. Further, the monopolistic discretion asserted by the authorities in the matter of designating "public enemies" means that those cast in this role cannot defend themselves. To plead innocence would compound their crime, for such a plea would merely be another attack upon the authorities.

What makes outlawry so dreaded is not merely the physical suffering it entails; it is, above all, the implication that the outcast must be considered by everyone as an enemy, a malignant wrecker, one who has forfeited his place in human society. It is easy to see that power based upon the possibility of putting the individual into the category of public enemies is in a way more awesome

and more complete than the power wielded by the master over the slave. The master can take his slave's life, but the totalitarian authority can take from the citizen things worth more than life.

The totalitarian society, then, is not a community of masters and slaves, but one of "good" and "bad," "deserving" and "harmful," "honored" and "dishonored" individuals, with one organ of this society being fully empowered to decide who will belong to one or the other category. The power-holders are thus not "masters," as they are in an aristocratic society. Their authority is not based upon some quality or title vested in them, but on service rendered to the community, a service supposed to be as immense and providential as the outcasts' crime is supposed to be black and pernicious. Those at the top must be considered by the citizenry not as masters but as saviors. The Single Party, which wields supreme power, is defined as an organ of redemption for the society. Whatever the Party decides is by the same token part of the work of redemption. Whatever act is declared by the Party to run counter to its aims thereby becomes the supreme crime; and to be accused of it by the Party is tantamount to condemnation.

THIS monopoly in determining everybody's status, which arises logically from the special conditions under which the Party took power, does not exist from the first moment the Party achieves control. It is acquired by a gradual process in the course of which the concept of "public enemy," at first attached to a rigidly circumscribed class of people, becomes more flexible so that it can embrace more and more kinds of individuals.

In every totalitarian society, we can distinguish two basic categories of "public enemies": the "public enemies by definition," against whom the Party's "redeeming mission" is originally directed; and the "public enemies by assimilation," who somehow come to share the stigma borne by the former group although they do not belong to it. Complete totalitarian domination is achieved only when the second group is added to

the first, that is, when the Party succeeds in putting all opponents or potential opponents of its "mission" on an equal footing with the original "public enemies." At the beginning of this process, a rather narrowly circumscribed minority is doomed and all others think that they are immune. At the end, nobody is immune: every "normal citizen" can be transformed into a "public enemy."

The "public enemies by definition" are the members of the "anti-society," the "iniquitous minority" whose members enjoyed "monstrous privileges" in the social system which the Party overthrew. The "redeeming mission" of the Party, as originally defined, consisted of smashing the social system in which "everybody" is oppressed and exploited to the sole advantage of the "iniquitous minority," the "bloodsuckers." For the Bolsheviks, the "public enemies by definition" were the members of the ruling strata of czarist society. For the Nazis, "public enemies by definition" were simply the Jews.*

Nothing can be more dissimilar than Russian society during the early stages of Bolshevik rule and Germany in the first years after Hitler's accession to power. In the first, we have chaos, civil war, the collapse of industrial and agricultural production, unbridled experimentation with new forms of administration; in the second, large economic facilities in good working order, though partly unused due to the severe depression, firmly established authorities, a rigidly disciplined society. Yet, in spite of many differ-

*This assertion is meant in the sense that the Jews, and the Jews alone, were a category of people whom the Nazis proposed to outlaw and banish from society as a mass. They alone were labeled as an anti-society, as people who had no right to exist, no matter how they behaved. Communists, socialists, militant Catholics, professing Protestants, and many other groups also were "public enemies," but not in the sense that the entire rank and file of these groups was to be cast out from society *en bloc*. With these last-named groups, terrorism was applied only to leaders and activists. With the "public enemy by definition," such a distinction between activists and rank and file is meaningless: every member of the group is the object of terror.

ences in detail, and in spite of the different ideological basis for the selection of the "public enemy," we can discern analogous principles applied in the early treatment of the "public enemies." In both cases, the main thing was the exclusion of the "public enemies" from legitimate pursuits, the encouragement of verbal, economic, and physical aggression against them, and the denial to them of civil protection and the right of self-protection.

In Russia, there was more physical violence and more terrorism applied against the "public enemy" during the early phase. Moreover, in large parts of the country, the "Whites" were in control and they in turn used terror and violence against the Bolsheviks. In Germany, the process was, in the beginning, more orderly, less violent, and far more one-sided. The Jews were not deprived of all rights and all means of livelihood at one stroke. Until November 1938, they remained active in some walks of life, and they could legally own property. But in one respect, they were treated like "public enemies" without reservation right from the beginning: they were denounced and held up to public hatred and scorn by all official spokesmen of the regime and by all organs of public opinion, and not a word could be said in public in their defense and in refutation of even the most ludicrous charges made against them. Thus, their moral annihilation was completed even before their economic and physical annihilation began.

For both the Bolsheviks and the Nazis, it was important to create the impression, prior to and immediately after their seizure of power, that all those not tagged as "public enemies by definition" would form just one big family. The Jews set apart, there remained in Germany only the "Volksgemeinschaft." The bourgeoisie eliminated, there remained in Russia only the "workers and peasants," with the "toiling intelligentsia" added as an afterthought. In this way, the Party could both win a maximum number of adherents and allies among those who had grievances, and disarm the inactive mass by creating the impression that terror and out-

lawry would remain selective, applicable only to the original "public enemies." If, in spite of the theoretically postulated "family solidarity" that was supposed to prevail in the society cleansed of the "public enemy by definition," the Party still had open opponents, these could be discredited as allies and helpers of the "iniquitous minority"—as, in other words, "public enemies by assimilation." They were traitors who deliberately destroyed bliss and harmony in the family by taking sides with the enemy. The early concentration of the attack upon "public enemies by definition" thus performed for the Single Party the essential function of enabling it to label all opposition as illegitimate and treasonable.

IN DEALING with the different categories of "public enemies," different techniques were used. As for "public enemies by definition," descent from members of a specified group was what set them apart, not only in Germany where they were defined in "racial" terms, but also in Russia where they were defined in "class" terms. In Germany, one had to have only Aryan grandparents; in Russia, one had to have proletarian parents. With regard to such people, disqualified by origin, the imposition of severe civic disabilities, combined with individual cases of terrorism, was deemed appropriate and sufficient.

With "traitors," the "public enemies by assimilation," outlawing had to be effected by different methods. They could not be set apart and expelled from the community by tagging them for what they "were" by descent. It was what they *did* that mattered, and this one could not see just by looking at them. Their crime required harsh and sweeping administrative reprisals, and immediate physical segregation from the community. It was also expedient to render them, as it were, invisible. This corresponded to the myth of family solidarity: all who remained visible were members in good standing; the solidarity of the family was broken only by people who, as Hannah Arendt puts it, "never existed at all." This formula never applied to the original "public

enemies by definition" as a group—the bourgeoisie in Russia, the Jews in Germany. Far from pretending that the bourgeoisie never existed at all, the Bolsheviks saw it everywhere even after it had been virtually liquidated; and the Nazis did likewise with the Jews. The "public enemy by definition" had to be seen where he was not. The "public enemy by assimilation" had to be invisible wherever he was.

It did, of course, require some effort to make it plausible that the "traitors" were in league with, and carried on the nefarious business of, the "public enemies by definition." To achieve this, the Bolsheviks developed the category of "objective" class enemies, that is, people who considered themselves "subjectively" proletarians and toilers but "objectively" were on a par with the capitalists. The Bolsheviks also made copious use of *ad hoc* theories to prove that opponents and rivals of the leadership were spies and paid agents of the foreign enemy. The Nazis seldom resorted to this type of defamation (I remember only one classic example, Hitler's sinister remark about General von Schleicher having met the French ambassador to "talk about the weather"), but in a sense, they also operated with the concept of people who were "objectively" Jews. In fact, all anti-Nazis, whether Marxists, liberals, or Christian believers, were "objectively" Jews, since their doctrinal beliefs were invariably of "Jewish" origin.

THERE is one further essential point about the "public enemies by assimilation" which has particular relevance to Soviet totalitarianism. This is the evolution of this concept after all open opposition had disappeared. Originally, the designation of "public enemy by assimilation" covers real and open opponents, people who actually challenge the Single Party's bid for power. As long as things are at this stage, it is still possible for the non-political bulk of the population to feel secure and to be convinced that outlawry would never affect them. But after all opposition had been suppressed, both in Germany and in Soviet Russia, ter-

rorism became more inclusive instead of more selective, and outlawry was applied against people who neither belonged to the category of "public enemies by definition" nor in any way opposed the Party.

The main reason for this is not far to seek. Once it is postulated that all opposition is illegitimate and treasonable, and that the outlawry of "public enemies" is imperative until there is complete unanimity, the technique of terror and outlawry *must* perpetuate itself. For unanimity cannot be the spontaneous, permanent state of *any* social group. Even if nobody dares or wants to challenge fundamentals, there is bound to be disagreement about specific policies, which inevitably have a different effect on people in different positions. Rivalry and competition for positions of leadership also are sure to emerge. As a consequence, freedom to criticize, to complain, and to press for changes cannot be granted even the members of the "redeemed" and purified community. For who knows where this would end? Why, people might even make comparisons with the past; black may appear somewhat less black, and white somewhat less white, than the "saviors" had painted it. Such ideas, however, strike at the very heart of the Party's "redeeming mission," and the Party's power would crumble if they were freely propagated.

Unless the Party of "saviors" wants to abdicate, then, it must continue to apply the technique of outlawry, this time against "insiders." A party of "saviors" cannot remain in power unless it treats all dissent, whether due to personal rivalries, pressures of divergent interests, or simple disappointment and discouragement, as anti-social and treasonable. This calls for the constant creation of new categories of "public enemies by assimilation," so inclusive as to leave nobody immune. People must be educated to feel that anyone can become a public enemy, simply by virtue of being so designated by the Party or its control organs.

The technique of domination through the fear of outlawry is not adopted because "total domination" is the conscious aim but because

it is the only technique possible once political control is established upon the basis of a "redeeming mission." It is not the diabolical ambition but the messianic pretension of the totalitarian ruler which turns him into the most complete tyrant known to history. In the case of Hitler, this distinction is not too important, because he wanted to be a "messiah" of the German warrior nation, and his "mission" aimed at military and political domination of other peoples. But in the case of Soviet totalitarianism, the differential diagnosis is crucial. We cannot understand the Soviet phenomenon if we assume that Lenin's original "mission," which was formulated in universalistic and humanitarian terms, but which had outlawry of the "enemies of mankind" as a corollary, was alien—either in substance or in causal, sociological relevance—to secret police rule in Russia.*

GRANTED that brutality and terror are bad things no matter who suffers by them, does it not make a tremendous qualitative difference on what basis "public enemies by definition" are selected? Is it justified to stress formal analogies between the roles played by the "bourgeoisie" in Russia and the Jews in Germany as "public enemies," without going into the "merits" of the case made against them? After all—so many socialists and liberals might argue—a revolutionary campaign against an exploiting upper class partakes of the essence of social "justice," whereas the outlawing of people on account of race or religion is a supreme "injustice." In the one case, we have to do with bad methods applied in a just cause, whereas in the other, both the cause and the methods are bad without reservation. Is

this not a difference of day and night, more important than the formal analogies?

That the selection of the "public enemy" in the case of Soviet Russia originally had more justification, both morally and intellectually, than in that of Nazi Germany, may be conceded easily. The heart of the matter, however, is the intellectual and moral quality of totalitarian control itself. Once there has been erected an image of the ruler as "savior," and a counter-image of the "public enemy" as anyone defined as such by the ruler, it makes no difference whether the "savior" combats a "real" social evil or a contrived one, or whether he "really" improves things or makes them worse. The outlawry of personally guiltless people is no more pardonable if it is practiced in the name of a "progressive" moral outlook than if it is practiced in the name of mere boorish prejudice or an out-and-out despicable myth. It might even be argued that the moral and intellectual harm is greater, if possible, in the former case than in the latter. The pure hatemonger and the myth-maker, being apparently beyond redemption, are also beyond corruption. But if the passion for social justice and betterment is turned into persecution, and if a scientific and philosophical analysis of society like the liberal critique of *l'ancien régime* is turned into dogma, something that might have been noble and great has been degraded. And this always happens when the champions of social justice adopt the technique of outlawry.

There is no difference of day and night here. Outlawry in the "good" cause is no better than—and ultimately no different from—outlawry in the "bad" cause.

*By the same token, the recent development in Russia and the satellite countries of attacks on Jews as being "cosmopolite" or "Zionist" traitors—for example, in the Slansky trial in Prague last month—would appear to be a consistent development of the doctrine of "public enemies by assimilation." See, for material on this development, the two articles in COMMENTARY: Solomon M. Schwarz, "The New Anti-Semitism of the Soviet Union" (June 1949), and Peter Meyer, "The Jewish Purge in the Satellite Countries" (August 1952).—ED.

BUT then: could this analysis not be applied just as well to our own case, and to that of any democratic society which defends itself against totalitarian subversion from without and within? Is the defense of any free society not something like a "redeeming action" directed against a designated group of "public enemies"? And, if that is so, are we not to expect that, as the

action proceeds, the original group of public enemies will be followed by "assimilated" public enemies, until a Single Party of "saviors" establishes its full-fledged, totalitarian rule?

Such fears are often expressed by liberals in Western societies. Apprehensive liberals like to draw alarming parallels between the rise of totalitarianism in Germany and Russia on the one hand, and the ultimate effects of anti-totalitarian repression in the West on the other. And those who draw such parallels could point to certain salient features of the preceding analysis as substantiating their fears. Has the shock of Communist danger, they might ask, not had a "traumatic" effect upon American society? And does repression of Communists and Communist sympathizers not often smack of "outlawry"?

We cannot enter here into a thoroughgoing discussion of the merits and the potential dangers of anti-Communist repression in the West and particularly in America. We may grant that anti-Communist action in America includes many things that are either irrational or inconsistent with democratic principles and mores. But it seems to me that this issue is confused rather than clarified by injecting the "deadly parallel" with totalitarianism into it. Whatever is wrong with certain anti-Communist practices and policies in America, it is not that they represent the initial stages of totalitarian rule, despite apparent parallelisms.

To begin with: the position of Communists in America is not the same as that of a group designated as an "iniquitous minority" and "public enemy by definition" under incipient totalitarianism. It is characteristic of the totalitarian technique that *an entire social category*, including its rank and file or "mass," is outlawed and banished from normal society. Every individual comprised in that stigmatized category is the object of measures of warfare; obscurity provides no safety. Repressive action against a *party* as such does not have such a comprehensive and indiscriminate character. It hits, not a social category, but an *organized action*

group, and particularly its most visible exponents. The self-defense of society against action groups organized for subversion should not be confused with the outlawing of entire social categories whose removal from society is seen to be a condition of social redemption.

To be sure, injustices and excesses may also occur in defending society against subversive action groups. People may be hurt who are neither disloyal nor subversive; penalties may also be inflicted in arbitrary fashion, disregarding essential legal safeguards. While a free society has the right, and the obligation, to defend itself against subversion, it cannot, in waging this struggle, disregard its own basic legal principles without endangering its own freedom. Even if no full-fledged totalitarianism is likely to arise from such an undermining of constitutional principles and procedures, the danger is great enough to justify watchfulness.

ACCORDING to the traditional liberal position, these dangers can be avoided if we take care to carry out the defense of society against subversion only within the framework of law enforcement. The law should define what actions are subversive, and repression should take the form of legal penalties meted out to those convicted under normal legal procedures of having violated this law.

This is in fact the dominant approach in American practice. American society prefers to deal with political dangers by making laws against them. I would not decry this approach; whenever society can rely on law-making to protect the integrity of its political institutions, that is all to the good. But I suggest that the problem of subversion cannot always be met by treating it solely as a legal one. For criminal law in general can be applied only against activities of isolated individuals. No matter how dangerous or reprehensible a certain type of behavior is, its legal repression becomes impossible as soon as it becomes endemic among enclaves of a society—even if the enclave represents only a minority.

There is a certain complacency and undue

optimism in ignoring the "mass support" behind subversion and applying the laws only against the most conspicuous ringleaders. In doing so, we not only neglect an important part of the political problem posed by subversion; we also violate the spirit of the law. Any law is necessarily debased if it is applied selectively; if it is impossible to punish all those who violate a law, it becomes unjust to punish only some of them.

These considerations show how difficult a task it is to defend a free society against subversion. The problem would not be too grave if we had to worry only about highly visible ringleaders. But in fact, we must also worry about the rank and file that supports them. Against such groups, we cannot apply the law, because this is technically impossible. And of course, we *must* not resort to extra-legal "outlawry" against the subversive supporting group as a whole, because this would in fact open the road to totalitarianism, no matter how justified our original motives and intentions might be.

IN THE end, the question of how to deal effectively with subversives is not whether to pass or not pass a law; most of the current debate about civil rights and civil liberties in the struggle against subversion is sterile because, in concentrating on the legal approach, it ignores the real question. The solution is elsewhere: the task is, in fact, one of political struggle, and it is a difficult one. For it involves devising suitable tactics to counter Communist action in fields where the party really has the strength to hurt us. This means combating "ideas" with intellectual and spiritual weapons—and much more.

More often than not, the subversive lead-

ership's hold upon the masses is due to manipulatory stratagems and organizational intrigue rather than to argument and persuasion. One of the problems we face is how to thwart covert Communist manipulation of certain social strata, for example of labor union members or progressive professionals and intelligentsia. Regulation by law may be helpful in this, but it cannot do the whole job. Clear, informed political understanding, and active, politically sophisticated leadership are required, and lines of argument and programs of action that take into account the greatest possible numbers of factors.

It would be fatal to assume that the administrative regulation of labor unions, or of educational or cultural agencies, can take the place of genuine anti-Communist majorities achieved by democratic means. It is all-important to insist upon a patient, specific, and democratic approach. Wholesale panic-mongering, the labeling, stigmatizing, and casting out of whole strata or groups, can lead us only to disaster. We will split rather than preserve our society if we allow anti-Communist action to degenerate into heresy-hunting and browbeating in the name of a streamlined orthodoxy. It would be the greatest triumph for Communism if we let our society be divided in this way.

Far from winning a victory, democracy suffers a defeat when minorities are found irredeemably disloyal and are cast out and penalized. Strengthening of the voluntary allegiance of people is the only real victory for democracy. If we can achieve this, we need not fear that our society will become totalitarian—either through failure to defend itself, or by sacrificing its freedom to the supposed requirements of self-defense.